

Friendships

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SOCIALITY

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Abraham Lincoln Sociability

Friendships

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

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FRIENDSHIPS OF LINCOLN

BY FRANCIS WIERMAN

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NEXT to his honesty, perhaps the most noticeable trait in Lincoln's character was his faculty for winning friends and keeping their affection through life. This was an almost necessary attribute to an ambitious young man who had no money, no social standing, and whose appearance and manner were against him. To say that Lincoln possessed "magnetism" does not explain his numerous and valuable friendships. The word "win" is used advisedly, for Lincoln seldom impressed people favorably at a first meeting; he compelled a respect and regard for his qualities and these in time grew into friendship. Sometimes he wrested love from those who were prejudiced against him before a meeting or who, upon their first encounter, disliked his careless dress and homely ways.

Every man who rises, as Lincoln did, from a lowly position to the highest, must often reach places in his career when he cannot do certain things for himself, but must depend on the offices of others. It is at times like these that friends prove their metal, and it is interesting, in studying the life of Lincoln, to note the occasions on which he could only mark time till some friend came forward with indispensable aid.

His Stepmother Took Him to Her Heart Almost at Once

LINCOLN'S first friend was his stepmother. In spite of the fact that she brought three children of her own into the home, when she married, she was soon won by the obedient and willing Abraham.



Lincoln.

She took the lonely little boy to her heart and made no difference between him and her own. She was the first person to recognize in him a superior nature; though she was without education or knowledge of the world, she realized that her stepson had precocious talents. She not only made him happy, but she encouraged him to observe

and study as much as his limited chances allowed. She always spoke of Abraham as her "good boy" and he remained that to her all his life. When Lincoln was almost grown, he looked about for some way to earn money. Wages were low, often paid in "trade" and opportunities scarce. He applied to Denton Offutt, who owned flatboats which he sent up and down the Mississippi with produce. Offutt needed a man badly and on a venture took Lincoln, who knew nothing of business, running a flatboat or selling goods; he was acquainted only with rude forms of farming. But he proved himself to be an ideal employee, working hard, doing well whatever he was set at, and—above everything else—absolutely honest. Offutt appreciated this last, as he had suffered from dishonest help. He promoted the new man to be his clerk and his respect and admiration ripened into deep friendship.

His Employer Boasted of Lincoln's Knowledge and Prowess

OFFUTT boasted that Lincoln "knew more than any man in the United States" and could "whip and outrun any man in the county." He talked about his clerk as if the latter were a favored son and it was Offutt who first called Lincoln "Honest Abe," a sobriquet that helped to make him famous and still clings to his name.

Offutt's bragging about the virtues and

prowess of his beloved clerk finally brought some trouble upon Lincoln and this in its turn was the beginning of another lifelong friendship. A gang of country "toughs" heard of Lincoln's reputation for fearlessness and strength and their leader, Jack Armstrong, determined to put an end to Offutt's bragging. Armstrong was big, heavy, squarely built and "strong as an ox." Backed by his gang he attacked Lincoln, but much to his surprise, the latter picked him up by the neck, held him out as if he had been a small boy and shook him till he was thoroughly cowed—"shook the bully out of him"—to use Lincoln's own words.

Shook Out the Bully and Made a Lifelong Friend

THIS may seem a strange foundation for a friendship; but Jack Armstrong knew no other way of judging a man than by physical standards. Lincoln had proved himself cooler and stronger and Armstrong admired him for it. He offered his hand and from that day was a devoted friend to Lincoln. When Lincoln was out of work, Armstrong gave him board and lodging and offered his purse. To this lowly friendship Lincoln devoted the same unswerving loyalty as to any other. Years after Jack Armstrong died, and Lincoln had become famous, he saved his old friend's son from a conviction and his widow from want.

A little later, after meeting Armstrong, he enlisted in the militia for three months and became a captain. This was his real start on his political career, for in that short period he made so many friends among his comrades that they nominated him for the State Legislature. He was defeated because he was unknown. But his townsmen voted

for him enthusiastically and this aroused his ambition and revealed his powers to him and gave him an inkling of a possible high destiny.

But the young man realized that he could not advance politically without a good knowledge of law. He was then 23 years old and had read but one law book—a second-hand "Blackstone's Commentaries" he bought at an auction. He had no money for books and did not know how he was to overcome this handicap.

Maj. Stuart's Law Library Great Help to Lincoln

DURING his short military service Lincoln's fidelity and unfailing good humor attracted the notice of Maj. John Stuart, who became much attached to him. At this crisis in his affairs, when Lincoln could not do the thing necessary, if he were to progress. Maj. Stuart supplied the lack. He owned what was, in those days an extensive law library and offered Lincoln the use of his books. What a Godsend this was to the eager young man! He thought nothing of the fourteen-mile walk to this friend's house, and he devoured the contents of every book there and was always grateful for that timely aid.

Everyone who knows the life of Lincoln is aware of his love for Ann Rutledge and of her death, which wrought a profound change in his whole nature. But before Ann and Lincoln loved each other, they were friends. The young girl first respected and then liked him and finally gave him her friendship, which he was wise enough to cherish until almost unknown to himself, Ann had grown to love him. Lincoln proved as true to that beautiful trust as he had to his friendships with men. It was to him that the girl first confided the details of her unhappy affair with McNeill; and it was to Lincoln that Ann first revealed her knowledge that McNeill was using an assumed name.

That a girl who felt unhappy over a lover who had apparently flown, should turn in her trouble to a young man rather than to an older person, was an unusual situation. It proves more than any other of his experiences, his genius for friendship, and his respect for it as a precious possession. For he took no advantage of her confidences, to press his own suit, until he felt sure Ann had ceased to care for her former lover; and this was certainly a severe test for a young man who was deeply in love!

The tragic death of Ann Rutledge affected her lover so deeply that for a long while his companions considered him insane. He undoubtedly showed many signs of insanity. He sank into a melancholy state, made no attempt to work and gave but little response to kindly efforts of friends to rouse him. He had reached another great crisis in his life and if he ever needed a devoted friend, it was during that time. He was in such a condition mentally that he was unable to make a move on his own behalf.

Bowlin Green was the friend who came forward then and proved his worth. He took Lincoln into his own home, followed him miles through the woods, and finally talked him back into a sane condition. Then he discussed the future and held up before Lincoln the prospect of a possible exalted career, in which Lincoln himself believed. Who shall say that Bowlin Green, the devoted and unselfish friend, did not save the great Emancipator for his task?

Later on, Lincoln suffered from a revival of this melancholy. It was soon after he became engaged to be married. Memories of Ann overwhelmed him and he sank into an alarming condition, brooding silently and oblivious to all his own interests. That time another friend, Mr. Speed, did for Lincoln what Bowlin Green had done before. He devoted himself to making Lincoln again normal and even went so far as to sell out his business and take Lincoln to Kentucky. For almost six months he watched over Lincoln and was finally rewarded by seeing him return to sanity and resume his rightful place as a leader of men.

Lincoln's Business Partner Often Protected Him

HERNDON, his legal partner and daily companion for years, was never called upon to help Lincoln in any great crisis. But he was faithful in all the small ways that give endurance to intimacy. Herndon possessed tact and discernment almost of a feminine type. The welfare and happiness of Lincoln were more important to him than business considerations or his own wishes. On the days on which Lincoln's unhappy home-life reached some minor climax, Herndon read the story in his partner's troubled expression. He asked for no confidences and received none. But he kept callers away and sometimes locked the doors upon Lincoln and went away for several hours, while his friend recovered his spirits in solitude.

It was the memory of such simple but oft-repeated kindnesses that made a strong bond between the two; so that, when Lincoln left to become President, he asked Herndon to leave the name of Lincoln on the sign above their office.

It is said that some men have a "genius for being friendly." But this was not all of Lincoln's secret; neither could the devotion of so many be explained by "magnetism." The friendships that he made lasted because they were built, not upon the sand of merely superficial attraction; but upon the rock of real merit in his character. He kept his friendship free from all taint of dishonesty or infidelity; he never failed a friend in need and he never forgot a kindness.

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INVITATION TO A SPRINGFIELD COTILLION PARTY OF WHICH LINCOLN WAS ONE OF THE MANAGERS.

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